of unusual disorder a considerable volume of trade was always carried along one or other of the roads.

This world trade has meant much to Syria. It has brought her wealth. It has given her inhabitants an occupation; until recently much of the trade not only passed through Syria but was handled in its passage by Syrian merchants. This has affected the nature of the Syrian towns, the caravan towns on the routes and the bazaar towns at the end of them. They have been cosmopolitan, the meeting-places of worlds, and their inhabitants have become quick-minded and flexible.

Trade has also affected the political history of Syria. Again and again powerful rulers in the neighbouring regions have stretched their hands over Syria, to tap the wealth of her cities and her routes. Often they have also desired to use her agricultural and forest resources. At other times it has been her strategic position which has tempted them; they have wanted to use her either as a defence-post against rivals or enemies in other neighbouring countries, or else as a bridge across which their armies could pass to attack those countries. The armies, like the caravans, have trodden immemorial paths. They have come sometimes up the Palestinian coast from Egypt; sometimes across the Euphrates from Mesopotamia or beyond; once, and most memorably, from Arabia; but most often from Asia Minor by way of gaps in the mountain barriers between Cilicia and northern Syria. Thus it has come about that for great parts of her history, Syria has been a province of an Empire larger than herself. On the whole, these have been the times of her greatest prosperity. Often she has been not only a part of an Empire or a world, but also its frontier.

Besides the movements of goods and armies, there has been a third movement, that of population. As a consequence of trade or war, or for other reasons, immigrants have flowed into Syria throughout history. There has been a trickle from Egypt and the Mediterranean countries, a larger stream from Anatolia, and occasional inrushes from central Asia; but above all there has been an uninterrupted flow from the Arabian peninsula. Not only individuals but whole tribes have come in. Nomads of Arabia have moved northwards and westwards, either because means of subsistence in the peninsula were insufficient or else under the attraction of plunder; from preying upon the cultivated land of Syria they have gradually

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PART TWO

III. THE PROBLEM OF WESTERNIZATION

1

AT this point it will be convenient to interrupt the narrative and to analyze the problem which first presented itself to the Syrians in the nineteenth century, and which underlies the political difficulties with which they are faced in the present generation. 178

This problem can be stated very briefly. An old way of thought and life, which has gone unchallenged and fundamentally unchanged for some hundreds of years, finds itself in some ways opposed, in others inescapably transformed by the new civilization of the West.

In consequence, the Syrians find themselves no longer living in a united and coherent world, but torn between two worlds, neither of which is altogether their own. How will it be possible for them, by preserving or modifying the old and accepting what is new, once more to form a unified world of thought and life which they can call their own?

2

At the beginning of the nineteenth century Syria formed part of a world which had a civilization of its own: a religion, a culture and a way of life. It was a unified civilization, in which every sphere of life was regulated by a system of generally accepted principles, themselves drawn from religion and from immemorial custom. This civilization may be called 'Arabo-Islamic', because its main characteristics were derived, with much borrowing from outside and with many adaptations to the peculiar conditions of Syria, from two main sources, themselves closely connected with one another: the Islamic religion and the life of the Arabian desert. 181

'Islam' means resignation, and the Moslem, the adherent of Islam, is he who resigns himself to the will of God: not in the sense of passive and fatalistic acceptance of anything which may come, but in that of the complete and voluntary submission of man's will to God's commandments. God is unique, the Creator of the Universe, all-wise and all-powerful; He has revealed His will to man, in a measure sufficient for all the purposes of life, through a long succession of Prophets, who include Moses, Jesus, and finally Muhammad, the Arabian of the seventh century, to whom was given the final revelation 179

no less important an element in the common consciousness than difference of religion.

It may be, indeed, that the religious doctrines to which the communities adhered were not in all cases the fundamental cause of their distinctiveness; that when these doctrines were first preached certain elements in the population already felt themselves in various ways and for various reasons different from the peoples among whom they lived and by whom they were dominated; and that they adopted the new doctrines as an expression of their distinctiveness. Whatever its origin, a sect once founded tended to become a closed community very conscious of its difference from the surrounding world: a difference which revealed itself not only in religious beliefs but also in customs and traditions. The sect persisted as a social entity even after the impulse of affirmation which gave it birth had died away. To leave one's sect was to leave one's whole world, and to live without loyalties, the protection of a community, the consciousness of solidarity and the comfort of normality.

6

Islam gave the traditional society of Syria its dominant creed, its explicit moral code and its political organization. Its language and literature and its images of heroism and human grandeur came from the Arabian desert.

The way of life of the Beduin has deeply influenced Islam and been as deeply influenced by it, but the two are distinct. It is a way of life which has developed in order to meet the needs of the nomadic existence, an existence of the utmost bareness, insecurity, homelessness and poverty. It has alone made that existence tolerable and given it dignity and even a certain splendour. For it the cardinal virtues are courage and the other martial qualities; hospitality without limit or thought of recompense; loyalty to one's family and tribe; and reverence for the transmitted wisdom of the community, embodied in tribal customs and traditions and in a code of honour. The life of the Beduin has no room for subtleties and doubts, and would be wholly barren of culture were it not for the Arab love of language, of story and of poetry.

The Arabian desert produced not only a moral system, but also a social organization. It was based upon the clan and

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the tribe or collection of clans, held together by blood-relationship and regulated by customary law dispensed by chieftains who owed their position to a combination of birth and ability.

Arab life and society were reflected in the literature of the Arabic tongue: a literature which at least in its early phases grew up in isolation, developing its own norms and methods. Later it was influenced by other literatures, but throughout its history it preserved a continuity of outlook and subject-matter and perfectly expressed the dreams, the convictions and the limitations of the people which produced it.

7

The Arabian influences were brought into Syria by the successive waves of Beduin immigrants from Arabia; a few generations after the Islamic conquest they had permeated virtually the whole population, whether or not they were Arabian by origin. The popular morality, the folk-lore and the language of the people became Arabic, and the literate took pride in Arabic poetry and prose. Tribalism and loyalty to the clan or patriarchal family continued to be the bases of society even in conditions very different from those which had generated them. The depth of Arabization varies however from one part of the country to another. In certain sections of the coastal mountain-ranges Arab ways took longer to penetrate and perhaps went less deep than in the plains of the interior.

The only important elements in the population which were not Arabized were the Kurdish and Turcoman tribes which at a later period had established themselves in the northern portions of the country, and some of which from being nomads had become semi-sedentary or sedentary. They however were not wholly isolated from the majority, since they were orthodox Moslems and possessed a tribal organization similar to that of the Arabs. There were also Armenians, Turks and Europeans in the larger towns.

8

The Arab tradition was modified by the new economic conditions which the tribes found when they reached the Fertile Crescent. Those tribes which remained on the edge of the Crescent continued their pastoral life; but those which

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In neither country is there an officer caste or a strong military tradition, though the present Syrian regime is trying to create one.

Social Survey

The ruling class in both countries is drawn from wealthy families; titles do not exist and the 'old' rich families, whose position and wealth come from land, mix freely with the 'new' rich families, whose money comes from commerce. There is no stigma in engaging in trade and even members of the upper class are merchants. A middle class of functionaries and employees has been growing up since 1948 in the three main cities. Their flats, between the splendour of the rich quarter and the huddle of the *suq*, are being built in quantities and their new, middle-class way of life is based on European standards. The mass of the people are artisans and labourers. The urban artisan approaches the middle class and the rural labourer approaches the hard life of the nomad; for the farm labourer the standard of living is generally low.

The Press

The press of both countries is important but no one paper or group of papers has established an ascendancy. Damascus had at one time over twenty daily papers none of which could guarantee a circulation of over 3,000. The same state of affairs holds true in Beirut where most parties issue Arabic and in some cases French papers; there are also Armenian newspapers and one English daily.

Individual Lebanese have founded papers and *Le Commerce du Levant*, published in Beirut, has a standing comparable with *La Bourse Egyptienne*. In both countries press censorship has frequently closed down a paper only for it to re-emerge under another name, and in Syria the military dictatorship has reduced the press to a mere mouthpiece of official propaganda.

Education

In both countries there are primary and secondary schools, and the number of schools and students increase each year. Primary education is compulsory, and although reliable figures of literacy are not available,[1] it may be assumed that the percentage of illiterates is decreasing in both countries, but is higher in Syria than in Lebanon. In Syria, most of the schools are run by the state and of the private schools (which are

[1] An estimate for Syria for 1947 given in UN, Dept. of Social Affairs, *Preliminary Report on the World Social Situation*, 1952, was 40–50 per cent.